

JESUS OUR EXAMPLE

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The Greek language of the New Testament has four nouns translated by the English word *example*. They are *deigma*, *hupodeigma*, *tupos* and *hupogrammos*. Altogether these four words occur twenty-four times. However, only two of these occurrences refer to Jesus as our example. The first is found in John 13:15 where the Greek word *hupodeigma* occurs and the second is I Pet. 2:21 where the Greek word *hupogrammos* occurs.

Hupodeigma is found a total of six times in the Greek New Testament (John 13:15; Heb. 4:11; 8:5; James 5:10; Heb. 9:23 and 2 Pet. 2:6). In the first four passages listed, the word is translated “example.” But, it refers to Christ only in John 13:15. *Hupodeigma* according to Thayer means *example*. Sometimes the example is one of **imitation** and sometimes it is for **warning** (Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 642). In the case of John 13:15, it is an example for imitation.

Hupogrammos is found only once in the Greek New Testament (I Pet. 2:21). Thayer indicates that this word refers to a writing copy, including all of the letters of the alphabet, given to beginners as an aid in learning to draw them. Hence, “an example set before one” (Thayer, 642). This word indicates how the disciple of Jesus Christ truly attempts to “copy” Christ by imitating Him over and over again with the aim of becoming like Christ.

Jesus our Example in Humble Service

The context of John 13:15 is important for understanding Jesus use of *hupodeigma*. This passage is the only time in the New Testament that Jesus refers to Himself as an example to His disciples. Jesus states, “For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.” The word Jesus uses for *example* literally means “to show under.” If you were going to

trace an image, you would place the original underneath the paper that you would use to make the copy. The underlying image could then be traced onto the overlying paper and the image transferred to the new paper. By meticulously copying the original image, you could produce an exact copy.

What does Jesus want His disciples to emulate? Does He want them to literally wash each other's feet? Or, does He want them to emulate His spirit of humility and His actions of service? Lenski helps clarify Jesus' meaning in this instance. He states that Jesus used the word *kathōs* (KJV-"as" in v. 15) meaning "in the same manner" rather than *ho* meaning "the same identical thing." He further states that Jesus did not mean to enjoin the same mechanical repetition in washing feet, but used "to wash one another's feet" in v. 14 figuratively of what they should continually do for each other. Jesus is **not** talking about a ritual that is repeated from time to time (literal foot washings). He **is** talking about an attitude of humility and action involving service. The right attitudes and actions are to be continually displayed among the disciples in their public ministry (see R.C.H. Lenski, *Interpretation of John*, 926).

Jesus makes an argument "*a majori ad minus.*" He states, "Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:13, 14). The "I" in the phrase "If I then..." is emphatic. The "if" introduces a first class condition which has the sense, "since it is a fact." The phrase "your Lord and Master" emphasizes the greatness of Christ. He is clearly the superior of the disciples. Yet, He has washed their feet! This truly illustrates the mind of Christ which displayed the self-forgetting ministry of love. If the Greatest person who ever walked this earth can humbly serve others, then the lowest disciple can likewise humbly serve others and become, through this service, like His Lord and Master. The pathway to greatness in the Kingdom of

Christ is humility and service. It is the self-forgetting ministry of love. This is a lesson the ego-centric disciples needed to learn, and it is a lesson for all true disciples of Jesus Christ. Real equality among the disciples of Jesus Christ is attained in this manner. All would be one by having the mind of Christ. Rivalry among the disciples would disappear. The resulting unity would strengthen them against the trials that were to come. This pathway is open to all who desire to choose it.

Jesus also states, “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them” (John 13:17). The first half of this statement is a first class conditional statement meaning that Jesus was fully aware that they knew what He meant by what He had just said. The second half of this statement is a third class conditional statement and means that Jesus has some doubt about whether or not His disciples will actually do what He said. Jesus is certain of their knowledge, but He is not certain of their obedience. Jesus is our example in humble service. We may know this fact, but we may not obey Jesus’ example. We must know and do what Jesus exemplifies. Then, we become examples to others. Without both knowing and doing what Jesus exemplifies, we rob ourselves of true happiness—of true blessedness.

Jesus Our Example in Suffering

The apostle Peter utilizes Jesus’ example in suffering to encourage the saints to whom he writes. They must learn to manage their own sufferings for righteousness sake. Peter writes, “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.” Peter uses the Greek word *hupogrammos* in this passage. Jesus is just like a *writing copy*. In dealing with suffering, our Lord demonstrates how we should manage injustice, cruelty, and mockery. We want to copy exactly what Jesus did when faced with suffering while doing good. What did Jesus do? He did not commit any sin. The aorist

construction here affirms the great fact that Jesus was absolutely sinless. Neither was guile found in His mouth. Some slaves may have resorted to deceit (guile) in order to save themselves from abuse. Jesus spoke only the truth whenever He spoke and remained pure and innocent in His speech toward others. He reviled not and He threatened not. He committed Himself to God. He trusted God to be the avenger of all injustice. It is important to note Peter's use of Isa. 53 verses 9 and 5 specifically in this passage. He identifies Jesus with the promised Messiah—the Suffering Servant—through whom redemption was promised. Jesus suffered for others. This is an act of love. It is sacrificial. It is substitutionary atonement. He actually takes their place. Jesus was not thinking of Himself while suffering on the cross. He was bearing the sins of others, suffering for them and in their place. He did this without a single murmur or complaint.

What happens when we are confronted with similar situations in which, as Christians, we must suffer injustices and ridicule from others? How do we bear it? Do we exhibit patient resolve? Do we manifest absolute self-control even of the tongue? Do we complain? Do we trust God to be the avenger? Do we selflessly love? Remember Christ!

Jesus is our example in humble service and enduring suffering for righteousness sake. Our Lord stated, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him” (John 13:16). The essence of discipleship is following the example of Christ. He provides us with an example of imitation in humble service and enduring suffering. Service and suffering are two of the fundamental aspects of discipleship. Jesus walked this pathway first. Now, we must follow “in his steps” (I Pet. 2:21).